

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Remarks at a White House Screening of "American Born Chinese"**

*May 8, 2023*

*The President.* My name is Joe Biden. [Laughter] I've never won an Academy Award. [Laughter] Can't act worth a damn. [Laughter] Can't sing, can't dance. Can't do much of anything. [Laughter] But it's good to be with all of you.

Good evening, everyone. This the largest Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration ever held in the White House. Ever.

And, Ke, thanks for that introduction and for the hope, the pride, and the joy that you embody. And I mean that sincerely.

It's been an incredible few months since the movie "Everything Everywhere All At Once" swept the award season. Seven Oscars—[laughter]—seven Oscars—for a movie about the extraordinary powers of an ordinary immigrant family. Best Picture, Best Actress, and, for Ke, the only—the second artist in Asian—of Asian descent to win Best Supporting Actor.

You know his incredible story: Born in Vietnam, separated from his family as a refugee in Hong Kong before reuniting with them in America when he was 8 years old. Four years later, Steven Spielberg, a friend and acquaintance, cast him as—at the side of Harrison Ford in "Indiana Jones." I hate to say this: That's how I remember you—[laughter]—most of all. That look on your face from that scene. [Laughter] Remember that? How can you forget that?

It was a decision that would give him a sense of purpose and change his life for him and his entire family—only to see the decades pass without new opportunities. But his wife Echo, she, in fact, kept the faith, telling him, "Your time will come."

Well, Ke was at the White House Correspondents' Dinner. I had a joke for you, pal. [Laughter] How you were famous in 1980s, then people counted you out—[laughter]—only to find—only to finally make it big in—3 years later. [Laughter] Hell, I know something about that too. [Laughter]

But your time did come, as it has for the entire community, a diverse community of cultures that are reflected in every part of American life, including in Government—by the way, a Government led by Kamala Harris, an Indian American, represented by a record number of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders all across my Cabinet, my White House, the entire administration.

And I want the community—there's a—and the community is represented here by a great friend and a great Congresswoman, Judy Chu. Where are you, Judy? Stand up. Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. And supporters in Congress, like Al Green, who's always there for everybody all the time, Al.

We see the community in all of you here tonight: leaders of business, technology, philanthropy, media, and so much more. And most of all, we see the possibilities of the community in all the young people here—all of you. What an attractive group of kids. [Laughter]

You represent the most gifted, talented, and tolerant generation in American history. You really do, your generation. The best educated, most tolerant, least prejudiced group in all of American history.

But just remember, when one of you becomes President of the United States and your staff tells you, "Joe Biden is out in the waiting room to see you"—[laughter]—promise me you will not say, "Joe who?" [Laughter] All right? You promise me you'll remember? All right.

Across America, we see the community give life to our cities, our small towns, our rural communities in every part of America. You know, together you embody the truth that our diversity is our strength as a nation. And that's not hyperbole, that's a fact.

That's why we rebuild our economy, invest in America; we're including, this time, all Americans. All Americans. That includes launching the first-ever National Strategy To Advance Equity, Justice, and Opportunity and to channel the full potential of the community, doing everything from combating anti-American—anti-Asian hate, to making Government services accessible in more languages.

That's what this is about. It's about bringing people in. This is your house, not mine; this is yours. And to help more people see themselves in the story of America, we signed historic legislation bringing us one step closer to a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture.

But, folks, we also know that for generations of progress, racism, harassment, and hate crimes persist. As I've said many times, hate can have no safe harbor in America. Silence—silence—is complicity. And we will not remain silent. That's why, with the help of many of you, I signed into law the bipartisan COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, and I hosted the first-ever White House Summit Against Hate-Fueled Violence.

Folks, together, we're taking on another scourge in the nation: gun violence. After the tragedies in California, Kamala and I joined Judy Chu in Monterey Park to honor the victims and give the community—and grieve with them and to turn pain into purpose. And Jill and I invited Brandon Tsay as our guest to the State of the Union because we wanted the country to see—to see all of you—your courage, your resilience, your faith, your pride in America.

I signed the most significant gun safety law in nearly 30 years. In Monterey Park, I announced an executive action to expand background checks, strengthen red flag laws, and so much more, so we can save more lives more quickly.

I wrote, along with Dianne Feinstein of California, the banning assault weapons. And for 10 years, violent, mass murders went down precipitously. But now it's back. We just have to finish the job and ban them again and high-capacity magazines. And let's finally hold the gun industry liable for the harm they—products produce.

Look, let me close with this. Earlier this year, I honored a group of trailblazing artists with National Medals of Arts and Humanities. The group included groundbreaking Asian Americans like Vera Wang and—Joan Shingang—I'm going to pronounce it wrong—Shangaka—kawawa [Shigekawa; White House correction]. I think I pronounced it correctly. She can call me "Joe Bidden." [Laughter] And Amy Tan, whose book, "The Joy Luck Club," became the first Hollywood film with all Asian American cast until "Crazy Rich Asians" 25 years later.

They'd be joined by movies and TV shows from another honoree of that day, Mindy Kaling, who's opened door—opened the door wider for more storytellers to follow. And across the board, we see groundbreaking works that capture courage, character, and the imagination and spirit of this remarkable community—diverse, remarkable community.

And building on this legacy is a show you'll see tonight: "American Born Chinese," based on a graphic novel. I just met the author. Gene, thanks for being here—for a coming-of-age story of growing up in different world and finding ways to bring it together.

When I think about this story, I think about the courage it took for so many of you and your ancestors to start the journey in America and continue the traditions of Native Hawaiians who have been engaged in that process for centuries; to adopt the old traditions anew and tell the ongoing story of America, stories of possibilities.

I was with Xi Jinping in the Tibetan Plateau, and he turned to me and he said, "Can you define America for me?" And I said, "Yes, I can." This is the God's truth. I said, "In one word: possibilities." Possibilities.

We're the only nation in the history of the world not based on geography, ethnicity, or anything else. We're based on the—an idea. An idea. Not a joke. The only nation in the history of the world based on an idea: that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights: life, liberty, et cetera.

We've never fully lived up to it, but we've never walked away from it. We have never, ever walked away from it. And, as President, it's an honor to live here in the White House, but it's first and foremost the "people's house," your house.

I just got back from Ireland, trying to keep the Irish accords together so things—but in the process, I—process—I was going back and seeing my relatives, who I hadn't met before. They go back all the way to 1157 in—up there in the—in the—in eastern Ireland, in—so the Louth province.

And the interesting thing about it is, all the immigrants who came here came for a reason. They were trying to escape something, in large part. We Irish were escaping because we were Catholics, and we were being persecuted. Well, guess what? I'm standing here as President.

And it's important to remind our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren and show the country all of our stories. We have—as we have here with the biggest Diwali, Lunar New Year, and Eid celebrations on a scale that the White House has never seen before. I'm determined to remind everyone—everyone—and we're doing it again tonight—that our strength lies in our diversity. It really, truly does.

Let me say one more thing. Nights like these are a reminder of the power of stories and the importance of treating storytellers with dignity, respect, and the value they deserve. I sincerely hope the writers' strike in Hollywood gets resolved and the writers are given a fair deal they deserve as soon as possible.

This is an iconic, meaningful American industry. And we need the writers and all the workers and everyone involved to tell the stories of our Nation and the stories of all of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, you know, I—they kid me because I'm always quoting Irish poets. *[Laughter]* I only do it for one reason: They're the best poets in the world. *[Laughter]*

But all kidding aside, every generation has an opportunity—has an opportunity to change history. And every four or five generations, we get to a point where we reach an inflection point, where major changes that are going to occur for the next four or five decades are set in place within a 4 or 5, 6-year period.

And we're at one of those inflection points right now. We truly are. The world is changing. And we have an opportunity. We have an opportunity to set in motion things that can't be turned back.

And one of those things is keeping the commitment that we made here at the White House, which is that this country—every major—every major aspects of this country is going to look like America, look like all of America.

Ladies and gentlemen, from the White House, it is my honor to host "American Born Chinese."

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:06 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to actor Ke Huy Quan; film director Steven A. Spielberg; actor Harrison Ford; Brandon Tsay, who, at the Lai Lai Ballroom and Studio in Alhambra, CA, disarmed Huu Can Tran, the suspected gunman in an earlier shooting at a second location, the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park, CA, on January 21; Sen. Dianne Feinstein; fashion designer Vera E. Wang; film and television producer Joan Shigekawa; actor, screenwriter, and producer Mindy Kaling; cartoonist Gene Luen Yang; and President Xi Jinping of China. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 9.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : "American Born Chinese," White House screening.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Chu, Judy M.; Feinstein, Dianne; Ford, Harrison; Green, Alexander N.; Harris, Kamala D.; Kaling, Mindy; Quan, Echo; Quan, Ke Huy; Shigekawa, Joan; Spielberg, Steven A.; Tan, Amy; Tsay, Brandon; Wang, Vera E.; Xi Jinping; Yang, Gene Luen.

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